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SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE · OFFICE OF INFORMATION · WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

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PROJECT CONSUMER CONCERN

Food And The Environment. "Project Consumer Concern," a joint program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Association of Retail Grocers, has as its aim "improving the processes of food distribution and helping achieve a quality environment in America." In announcing the new program, USDA officials pointed out that the American food industry -- from the farmer to the retailer -- is the most advanced food industry in the world, providing nutritious and healthful food for our Nation's 210 million people every day. But the increasing size and complexity of its operations place new strains on the industry's efficiency and effectiveness. Improper handling of food from producer to consumer results in decreased quality, losses due to shrinkage, reduced profit margins, higher consumer prices, and development of organisms harmful to health. Then there is the serious problem faced by both the industry and consumers -- eliminating the waste materials generated by the production and transportation of vast volumes of food. Consideration of these problems led to the development of "Project Consumer Concern" under the USDA Environmental Thrust program. Task force committees of both USDA and NARGUS will cooperate in implementing the basic objectives of the two-year program: To impress on retailers, wholesalers, and consumers the importance of working together for an improved environment and wholesome food supply; to demonstrate the benefits of a more efficient and concerned food marketing system; and to effect improvement in handling, storage, and distribution of food. Successful retail food stores in three different areas will be used as "showcases" for the program. Officials hope that before the two year period is up, a high percentage of retail food stores will be involved in the program and that it will have expanded to include sections of the total food distribution industry.

JULY PLENTIFUL FOODS LIST

Cool Menu Ideas For Hot Summer Days. Turkey, featured on the July Plentiful List, is becoming a versatile and popular all-season menu item. The other foods on the List can make happy table companions of tasty turkey dishes. These include fresh plums, watermelons, and fresh vegetables such as tomatoes, sweet corn, cucumbers, lettuce, and celery, among others. For August, the Plentiful List will have wheat products, nectarines, fresh vegetables, peanuts and peanut products, broiler-fryers, turkeys, and eggs.



THE SKIN GAME

New Leathers With Added Attractions. Scientists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service have developed a process that gives leathers new and improved properties -- promising many advantages for consumers. The process -- called graft polymerization -- consists of forming a synthetic polymer within the leather, improving its physical characteristics permanently and to a greater extent than conventional surface treatments. The scientists experimented with a number of synthetic materials belonging to a class of chemical compounds known as polyacrylates. By varying the conditions of treatment and the acrylic compounds, many of leather's natural characteristics could be enhanced or suppressed, depending on how the leather was to be used. Some treatments increased the stretch, a property much in demand for garment leathers. Others had the opposite effect, making a firmer material. This feature might be applied to sheepskins giving them enough body to be used as shoe uppers. Most of the treatments added to the thickness of the leather affecting most of the thinner parts of the skin. This tended to produce a material of more uniform thickness. Leathers modified by the process were generally stronger, some increasing their break strength as much as 77 percent. The polymers formed in some of the leathers could not be extracted with solvents indicating that the treated leathers could be dry cleaned. Scientists are continuing research into the technical and economic feasibility of the new process -- so you may have a stretchable, firm, soft, strong, uniform, drycleanable leather in your future.

NEW SHORE PLANT

For Shifting Sands By The Seaside. A new low-growing, coniferous evergreen with the lovely name of Emerald Sea shore juniper is showing promise as a cover plant on coastal and inland sand dunes in this country. According to horticulturists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service, the mat forming habit and salt spray tolerance of Emerald Sea should make it an ideal stabilizer in these areas -- as it has done in its native Japan. The shore juniper is presently undergoing tests along the New Jersey coast, and plantings were recently released by USDA to experiment stations, arboreta and qualified nurserymen for further tests as an ornamental ground cover, particularly on sandy soils. The foliage of the evergreen is emerald green in summer and fall, changing to yellowish green in winter. Each needle-like leaf exhibits a single gray-green stripe on the upper surface. Unlike earlier introductions of this species, Emerald Sea shore juniper remains prostrate in growth habit.

FHA OPENS COMPLAINT CHANNEL

For Happier Homeowners. "If a homeowner is dissatisfied with the condition of his property, he will be less likely to maintain it and less likely to meet his financial obligation." Working on this premise, the Farmers Home Administration has adopted a new complaint procedure to assist homeowners-borrowers and to protect its own financial stake in the property. Under the new procedure, rural families who finance their homes through FHA may hold builders to performance standards by channeling complaints through local offices of the USDA rural credit agency. Specifications for each new house or remodeling job financed by FHA must be approved with inspections conducted during and at the completion of the work. Now a dissatisfied borrower is asked to submit a list of grievances to the builder requesting corrective action. If this does not solve the problem within 30 days, he may inform the FHA county supervisor who will intervene with the builder. If the builder does not respond within another 30 days, the FHA supervisor is required to investigate, determine whether complaints are justified, and seek prompt correction of all justified complaints. Should the builder continue to fail to make required corrections, formal proceedings may be instituted to suspend the builder from further participation in any FHA-financed construction.

BE ON THE VEE, EEE, AND WEE ALERT

If You Have An Equine In The Family. Officials of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service urge owners throughout the country to vaccinate their horses, ponies, mules, and burros for the three types of equine sleeping sickness present in the U.S.: Venezuelan, Eastern, and Western equine encephalomyelitis. All three, VEE, EEE, and WEE, are transmitted to horses by mosquitoes which are now emerging in large numbers. Each type of the deadly equine diseases is caused by different viruses. However, infected animals exhibit similar clinical symptoms. Laboratory analysis of blood or tissue specimens is needed to confirm a diagnosis. Effective vaccines are available; however, vaccination for EEE and WEE does not protect against VEE and vaccination for VEE does not protect against the other two. EEE and WEE are well-known in this country with devastating outbreaks occurring in the 1930's before effective vaccines were developed. The lethal VEE entered the U.S. for the first time last summer from Mexico. This year three outbreaks of VEE have been reported by Mexican authorities with the latest located about 650 miles from the Texas border.

THE SAGA OF SOAP

In Life's Wash Cycle. With synthetic detergents involved in environmental problems, good old soap is finding its way back into the laundry tub. However, while soap is environmentally acceptable and the best soft-water detergent there is, it does have a drawback. In hard water, soap forms a curd or scum which deposits itself on clothes in the laundry or as a ring around the bathtub. Now, soap may well regain its place in the laundry, thanks to scientists of USDA's Agricultural Research Service. Recently ARS chemists announced development of modified soaps that perform as well in hard water and at low washing temperatures as today's phosphate and carbonate laundry detergents. The scientists took plain soap and added a fat-based compound that would prevent the hard water curd (lime-soap) from forming. A number of derivatives of fatty acids, alcohols, and amines were found to be effective. To make it as efficient as the best detergents, however, it needed something more. So the chemists replaced some of the lime-soap dispersing agent with what detergent makers refer to as a builder. They found nontoxic and nonpolluting compounds like citrate and silicate made excellent builders. The scientists tested 15 of their best formulations with results that showed the modified soaps were equal to or better than either plain soap or present detergent compositions. Since the modified soaps appear to be completely and rapidly biodegradable, contain no substances known to be harmful to health or to the environment, and are made from an abundant and renewable natural material (animal fat), there is a distinct possibility that soap's future is whiter and brighter.

ANOTHER MEAT AND POULTRY LEAFLET

Care Tips In Spanish. A second leaflet giving tips on meat and poultry in Spanish is now available from USDA. The newest one, "Carne de Res y de Aves de Corral -- Como Cuidar Sus Comestibles," G-174-S (Meat and Poultry -- Care Tips For You) gives information on buying, storing, handling, and cooking meat and poultry products. It includes such helpful hints as the proper cooking temperatures for different cuts of meats, recommended storage time for fresh and frozen products, how to wrap meat and poultry products, how to wrap meat and poultry for storage, and tips on cleanliness to avoid food poisoning. The first of the meat and poultry leaflet series available in Spanish is the "Carne de Res y de Aves de Corral -- La Etiqueta es su Major Consejero" G-172-S (Meat and Poultry -- Labeled For You). Single free copies of each of these publications -- both Spanish and English language versions -- may be requested from the Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. The English leaflets are numbered G-172 and G-174.

IMPROVE IT WITH PLANTS

Landscape For Living. The 1972 Yearbook of Agriculture, "Landscape For Living," takes up the subject of improving the environment with plants. In the 416-page hardback book, home gardeners will find a wealth of how-to-do-it information. Chapters cover such practical subjects as shrubs, perennials, annuals, lawns, vegetables, fruits, herbs, plant propagation, greenhouses, fertilizing, mulching, and composting. Other chapters deal with container gardening, landscaping limited areas, ground covers, minimum care plantings, controlling erosion, brightening neighborhoods, and attracting birds. The book also discusses some out of the ordinary gardening ideas such as ways to ease visual pollution, plants as climate changers, new towns, land planning, rent-a-garden projects, and redesigning downtown shopping areas. One section is devoted to plants in action -- helping raise the spirits of inner city residents, teaching youth about the environment, aiding the handicapped, and providing new vistas for senior citizens. The handsome book is liberally illustrated with photographs and sketches including a 32-page color photo section. Copies of "Landscape For Living" will be available about August 1, in time for fall gardening, from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. The cost is \$3.50 a copy.

VACATION TIME

Play It Safe. Everyone looks forward to a summer vacation. But thousands of families each year have their outdoor vacations ruined by being lost, sick, or injured. And that's no picnic. Many times outdoor fun is needlessly spoiled because vacationers don't take the proper precautions -- they don't Play It Safe. USDA is stressing August as Vacation and Camping Safety Month. The 187 million acres of National Forests provide outdoor recreation in the forms of camping, picnicking, hiking, backpacking, bicycling, horseback riding, and water sports. To ensure that your National Forest vacation is a safe one, the Forest Service has prepared a booklet "Outdoor Safety Tips," (PA-387). Copies are available at 15 cents each from Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Also available from the Superintendent of Documents are two other USDA booklets that can help you keep your vacation safe and happy: "Keeping Food Safe To Eat" (G-162) and "3 Leaves Mean Poison Ivy" (PA-839) are for sale for 10 cents a copy.

NOTICE TO READERS

SERVICE Has A New Number. A new telephone system called Centrex has been installed at the Department of Agriculture. This has changed all the exchange numbers. The new number for the Editor of Service is:

Area Code 202 447-5437

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